3102

THREE SHORT SERMONS

ON

CONFIRMATION.

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE.

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Moberley.

3102

ACTS VIII.

14. Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John,

15. Who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost,

16. (For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus).

17. Then laid they their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

THE time having come round at which it has been usual to administer the rite of Confirmation in this place, and many of you who now hear me being of age sufficient to undertake for yourselves that Christian Vow, Promise, and Profession which was made for you at your Baptism by your Godfathers and Godmothers; I propose on this and the succeeding Sundays to direct your attention to the history and meaning of that most solemn rite, in order that you may understand what it is that you are about to do, and by God's blessing may be enabled to derive from it those high Christian advantages which it is intended and eminently fitted to bestow. At present I propose to give you a short account of the rite itself, and the manner in which it has been administered in the former ages of the Christian Church.

In the time of the Apostles, that is, in the only time

of which we have any complete historical record in the New Testament, persons were received into the Church by Baptism, when they were already of mature age. We, therefore, can expect to find very few passages in the Bible itself, which shall speak expressly of the rite of Confirmation as at present used. There are however two passages in the Acts of the Apostles which are of great importance in this consideration, as indicating that usage of the Apostles themselves, from which our own has been derived. The first of these is the one which I have chosen for my text. "Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who when they were come down prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, (for as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost." In much the same manner, when St. Paul found at Ephesus those who had been baptized with John's baptism by Apollos, and had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost, he first baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and "then laid his hands on them, and the Holy Ghost came on them." From these two passages we draw two conclusions:—1st. That St. Paul (and probably the other Apostles as is argued from the opening of the 6th chapter to the Hebrews), accompanied the administration of baptism with imposition of hands. And 2ndly, that when baptism was given by an inferior minister, the Apostles immediately laid

their hands upon the new baptized, who thereby received the Holy Ghost.

Thus it appears that in the Apostolic times when converts were (in every instance recorded in Holy Scripture) baptized as adults, the ceremony of Imposition of Hands accompanied or closely followed upon Baptism: perhaps as a solemn completion, in the form of a blessing from the highest order of Christian ministers, of the previous sacramental rite.

But very shortly after these earliest times, it began to happen that Children were born of Parents already converted, and were baptized immediately after their birth: and thus the two rites which were originally united, and were nearly simultaneous, began by degrees to be dissevered. In many instances indeed infants were confirmed immediately after Baptism, and allowed to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as soon as they were confirmed. The change, however, was gradually taking place. Confirmation was always administered by Bishops, and therefore some space of time must frequently have intervened before it could be procured. Add to which that the Sacrament of Baptism being fully performed by the inferior minister, obvious benefit was seen to arise from deferring the subsequent blessings to an age of more maturity. According to the description given in Bingham's Antiquities of the Christian Church, the ceremony of Confirmation in these ages consisted of four parts. The first of these was the Unction of the Chrism, or Holy Oil. This was administered by the

Bishop with a form of words which varied in length at different times, and of which a part was sometimes repeated by the Presbyters who were present. The shortest form was in these words σφραγὶς δωρεᾶς πνεύματος ἁγίου—'The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.' Of the origin of this part of the ceremony (which has grown into such importance in the modern Church of Rome as to be adopted as the *external sign* of their pretended Sacrament) there is no satisfactory account: but as no mention is made of it till the time of Tertullian, who flourished in the second century after Christ, it is generally believed that it began to be practised, either in his lifetime, or shortly before it. Certainly there is no pretence for Scriptural authority in its behalf; and the absence of this sanction effectually excludes it from like nature of Christian Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

After the anointing with the Chrism, the Sign of the Cross was made upon the forehead of the person to be confirmed. This practice which was by no means confined to the rite of Confirmation, but was used in almost all the ceremonies of the Church, seems to have sometimes given a name to the entire confirmation, which was thence called Consignation.

Lastly came the two parts for which there was the most authority of Apostolic usage,—the Imposition of Hands, and Prayer for the effusion of the Holy Ghost.

Of the value of the whole rite, it appears that the opinion of the Primitive Church was not much unlike

our own. While Baptism might be administered by Presbyters and Deacons, the Bishop alone gave confirmation. "And this," according to St. Jerome, "not because the benefit, grace, and dignity thereof is greater than Baptism; but rather, for that by the Sacrament of Baptism men being admitted into God's Church, it was both reasonable and convenient, that if he baptize them not, unto whom the chiefest authority and charge of their souls belongeth, yet for honour's sake, and in token of his spiritual superiority over them (because to bless is an act of authority), the performance of this annexed ceremony should be sought for at his hands." It therefore often happened that a considerable time intervened between the two ceremonies, even though they were in the intention of the Church united. Under these circumstances, death of course frequently ensued after Baptism, and before the administration of confirmation. The question therefore arose, how far Baptism by itself was a complete sacrament, having in itself efficacy, though unaccompanied by the ordinary prayers and benedictions of confirmation. To this they answered that the New Birth, or Baptism, gave innocence, and pardon of sins; but the invocation of the Spirit added wisdom and strength to preserve and establish men in innocence unto perfection. If men died immediately after Baptism, without Imposition of Hands, they were saved by their innocence which they had acquired in Baptism; they needed no other confirmation but death, which was a security against all other dangers. Confirmation was only necessary to those who were to live and fight with the world, and the Invisible Powers.

Thus it appears that the usage of the Primitive Church forms a clear and reasonable comment upon the passages of Scripture wherein we read of Imposition of Hands as practised by the Apostles. Like the Apostles, the early Church allowed Baptism to be administered by the inferior orders of the Clergy, while Confirmation was given by Bishops alone. Like the Apostles, also, they in intention united the ceremony of Imposition of Hands immediately with the sacrament of Baptism. But as in the course of time, and from the enlargement of the Church, the adherence to the Apostles' usage in the first of these particulars, rendered a similar adherence impossible in the second of them, they were compelled to disjoin the two celebrations, and thus to agitate the question, of which I have already spoken, of the validity of Baptism by itself.

This question being settled as above stated, the only further one which remains to be considered is this,—how far does the rite as at present celebrated retain the power of conveying spiritual blessings, which it possessed, as distinct from Baptism, in the Apostolic age?—To this question also the readiest answer is to be obtained from a reference to the opinions of the early Church after the times of the Apostles. The visible manifestations of the Holy Spirit were then, as now, no longer consequent upon Imposition of Hands. Then, as now, Imposition of Hands was often disjoined from Baptism; and they appear to have held that as the rite, as they celebrated it, was with some necessary differences, an imitation or continuation of that practised by

the Apostles, so it was capable, when properly administered, of conveying such ordinary spiritual blessing as was still bestowed upon the Church.

We have departed yet one step further from the precise usage of the Apostles, in that we defer the ceremony of confirmation, which was already separated from Baptism, to that more mature age, "so soon," according to the words of the Baptismal Service, "as the children can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, in the vulgar tongue, and be further instructed in the Church Catechism set forth for that purpose." This further departure however from their exact usage is no further departure from the spirit of their institution. The almost invariable custom of Infant Baptism has naturally postponed Confirmation; and if by waiting until an age of some maturity, we do not anticipate the first beginnings of actual sin, we thereby gain the additional advantage of a personal acknowledgment of the Baptismal obligation, and a renewed vow to lead a pure and holy life. Such a public and personal profession of the Baptismal vow, the Church holds to be, on many accounts, useful and edifying. To the Sponsors it proposes a time at which they will have, in some sort, to render an account of the manner in which they have discharged the obligations of instruction and care which they undertook at the Font. To the Congregation it exhibits the edifying spectacle of a formal acknowledgment of Christian truth, and a deliberate vow to pass a holy and religious life; besides that it recalls the similar passage in their own lives in which they bound themselves by the same vow, which they well know how they have

kept. Above all, to the person confirmed it gives a strong and valuable impression of the promises made on his behalf at Baptism, promises, which though he was indeed bound by them before, yet had never been so vividly presented to his mind, as now, when in the presence of the Church, and in company with others making the same profession, he solemnly vows to observe them until his dying day. To the Church at large it offers a pleasing and satisfactory assurance that the doctrines and practice of true Christianity will continue to flourish: for though of the numbers, who in the rite of Confirmation pledge themselves anew to fulfil their Baptismal vows, there may be some who for awhile forget their obligations, and are seduced away into sin;—and some, who may be found at the last day with the seal of their election removed by their own wickedness from their foreheads, yet we cannot doubt that there are many who will steadily abide by what they honestly promise, and exerting themselves to the utmost to further true religion upon earth, in themselves and their neighbours, will receive from their Lord the Crown which He hath promised in another world. We may therefore reasonably believe that our rite of confirmation being, as far as the different circumstances permit, a sober and discreet imitation of Apostolic usage is attended with the effusion of those spiritual gifts which are still imparted to the Church. But then as by the age of the persons confirmed the rite has become a more complex one, it is necessary that there should be on their part a deliberate and sincere intention of fulfilling the vows which they make, a real belief in the articles of faith to which they pledge themselves, and sincere prayer for the blessings

which Baptism first, and all other Christian rites after Baptism are intended to convey. Where these qualifications are present in the person confirmed, then there can be no doubt that Confirmation is a highly beneficial and spiritual ceremony. The prayers of the Congregation moreover, and the benediction of the Bishop, are means of grace which no Christian Church has ever undervalued, and these conspire to give real importance to confirmation. We claim for it no Sacramental efficacy, no sign of divine institution, to be means and pledge of especially promised grace: but we do claim for it the respect and reverence due to a rite founded upon Apostolic usage, continued throughout the History of the Church of Christ, ordained by competent authority, full of edifying effects, and accompanied with Prayer, Good Resolutions, and Holy Benedictions. And thus speaks Hooker of this rite as ordered in our own Liturgy. "Finally, the cause of severing Confirmation "from Baptism was in the parties being baptized being "infants, at which age they might very well be "admitted to live in the family: but because to fight "in the army of God, to discharge the duties of a "Christian man, to bring forth the fruits, and to do the "works of the Holy Ghost, their time of ability was "not yet come, there could by stay of their confirma-"tion no harm ensue, but rather good. For by this "means it came to pass that children in expectation "thereof were seasoned with the principles of true reli-"gion, before malice and corrupt examples depraved "their minds; a good foundation was laid betimes for "direction of the course of their whole lives, the seed of "the Church of God was preserved sincere and sound,

" the Prelates and Fathers of God's family, to whom
" the cure of their souls belongeth, saw by trial and ex-
" amination of them, a part of their own heavy burthen
" discharged, reaped comfort by beholding the first
" beginnings of godliness in tender years, glorified Him
" whose praise they found in the mouths of Infants; and
" neglected not so fit opportunity of giving every one
" fatherly encouragement and exhortation. Whereunto
" Imposition of Hands and prayer being added, our
" warrant for the great good effect thereof is the same
" which Patriarchs, Prophets, Priests, Apostles, Fa-
" thers, and Men of God, have had for such their par-
" ticular invocations and benedictions, as no man, I
" suppose, professing truth of religion, will easily
" think to have been without fruit."

2nd TIMOTHY, iii, xv.

From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

THE Apostle St. Paul addresses these words to Timothy, his own son in the faith, when he is exhorting him to fulfil to the utmost the duties of a Bishop in the Church of Ephesus, over which he had been appointed. Timothy, as we find from comparing the History of the Acts, with the Epistles sent to him by St Paul (though dwelling far from Judea, in the midst of Asia Minor) had been bred up carefully by his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois, in the knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, and was well spoken of by all the Jews who were settled in that part of the world. St. Paul here reminds him of the great privilege and blessing which it had been to him to have known these Scriptures from his very childhood;—and magnifying the importance of this blessing almost to a degree beyond what we might have expected, he tells him that these Scriptures (that is, the writings of the Old Testament) are able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. We must understand St. Paul to mean, that Moses and the Prophets wrote so clearly of Christ, and the coming Salvation, that a Jew, who read their writings with a humble and submissive

spirit, would be quite sure to acknowledge Jesus, when in the fulness of time he came upon the Earth, and to put all his trust and confidence in his merits and mercy.

If then, my brethren, St. Paul, speaking by the Spirit of God, used language like this to Timothy, respecting the blessedness of possessing the knowledge of the Old Testament, think what much stronger expressions he might have used to us, who one and all, have possessed, and been instructed in the New Testament, the very Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, from our earliest years. If it were so great a blessing to know of Christ through the dark medium of Prophecy, more or less obscure and much misunderstood, think of the blessing of seeing Him as it were face to face in the Holy Gospels! of knowing with most perfect assurance, Who He is, what He has done for us, what He requires us to do for ourselves, what help He giveth us to enable us to do it, what inexpressible rewards He offereth to those who in humble reliance on His merit and help endeavour to do His will. And if this be a matter of great consideration and importance, then think further that we have not only these books in possession, have not only access to knowledge which we may neglect if we please, and remain in our original darkness; but that we have been dedicated to God in Baptism, that our parents, deeply interested in our welfare, and knowing that to believe and be baptized was the only entrance into the kingdom of Heaven, brought us, long before we can remember, to the Holy font; that Christian friends did then and there undertake for us, who were of too tender age to take it upon ourselves, that we would

live as faithful and obedient Christians all our lives; that we bear, each of us, our Christian name, the mark and token of our vowed subjection and obedience; and more, far more than all, that with the sprinkling of that mystical water upon our flesh, the Holy Spirit of God came into our hearts, received us by His presence within the flock and fold of God, since that moment has never ceased to solicit our hearts to good, to waken up a secret voice against sin contemplated, and secret remorse against sin committed,—to accompany our most inward thoughts, to strengthen our desire of obedience, and enable our weak and corrupt hearts to conceive the wish of holiness, and bring it to accomplishment. Is it not enough to make us very humble and sad, to think what we are and how we live, when we consider all this? How do we repay His mercy, what use do we make of it? These invaluable Scriptures,—this early dedication,—this continual fund and supply of grace,—do they make us more diligent and anxious to please God? to do His will? to shew our gratitude to him by obeying His law? These are important questions to all, whether they are far advanced, or newly entering upon their course of life, but to none more important than to those who are now about to take a most serious and solemn step, to promise and vow for themselves, in the face of God and His Church, what their sponsors promised for them at their Baptism.

On Sunday last I gave you a short account of the History and meaning of the rite of Confirmation: at present I propose to speak of the Baptismal Vow, which was originally undertaken by the Godfathers and God-

mothers, and is now to be assumed by the persons for whom it was made.

The actual Vow, as contained in the Baptismal Service is as follows: The Minister asks the Sponsor, Dost thou in the name of this child renounce the Devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of this world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them? To this the Sponsor answers, I renounce them all. The Minister then proceeds to put the Apostles Creed into the form of a question, in order to ascertain the belief of the person to be baptized, to which this answer is given 'All this I stedfastly believe.' 'Wilt thou then be baptized in this faith?' 'I will.' 'Wilt thou then obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of thy life?' 'I will.'

In the Catechism this undertaking on the part of the Sponsors is thus acknowledged: In answer to the question 'What did your Godfathers and Godmothers then for you?' the Catechumen replies 'They did promise and vow three things in my name, first, that I should renounce the Devil and all his works, the Pomps and Vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that I should believe all the articles of the Christian Faith; and thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life.'

The Vow, therefore, which each one of those to be

confirmed will shortly take upon himself consists of three parts; the first, Renunciation; the second, Belief; and the third, Obedience. I shall confine myself at present to the consideration of the first of these, the Vow of Renunciation.

In the Primitive Church this part of the Vow was twice made, once in presence of the Congregation, when the Convert obtained leave to be baptized, and once at the actual time of baptism. At this time he was brought into the Church to the Baptistery or Font, and standing with his face towards the west (which being directly opposite to the east, the place of light, symbolically represented the Prince of Darkness, whom he was to renounce), was commanded to stretch out his hand as in defiance of him. In this posture he was interrogated by the Bishop concerning the breaking off of all former leagues and commerce with Sin, and the Powers of Hell. The Bishop asked "Dost thou renounce the Devil and all his works, power and service?" To this the person to be baptized replied "I do renounce them."

Although in our usage this significant gesture and form are no longer practised, yet we also require an express renunciation of the Devil and his works, meaning by this a complete relinquishment, and abandonment of all sin and wickedness; for all sin is derived from the influence and example of our great enemy, the Evil Spirit. And here we must remember that these are no metaphorical words to signify merely bad conduct of our own, but that literally and really it is the influence

of Satan, the Prince of Darkness, which we are to renounce. The Bible speaks plainly of this mischievous and dangerous enemy. It repeatedly tells us of his power on the earth, and the need of resisting him. We must, therefore, set ourselves in prayer to overcome him. We must pray that the Holy Spirit may fortify us within, and the good Angels may protect us around, from his assaults, and resolve that with God's grace we will utterly put aside and relinquish all such things as he is pleased with—all such desires and designs as arise in our hearts from his wicked suggestion.

Having thus renounced all sin in general, the person to be confirmed is to specify, two particular kinds of sin; the one, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world; the other, the sinful lusts of the flesh:—the first signifying all such sins as we are tempted to commit from the practice or encouragement, or example of other people;—the second, such as arise from the inward wickedness of our own corrupt nature.

By the pomps of the world are meant, the pursuit of honour or wealth, the love of distinction, or shew, fondness for power or influence over other men. All such things, though men may call them objects of honourable ambition, or though the whole world around us are seeking and toiling after them, are not to be the objects of a sincere Christian. If he finds that such things occupy and engross his mind, he is bound by his solemn vow to give them up. If he finds that the want of them distresses him, or the presence of them elates him, or the search for them wholly or mainly employs him, he

is giving way to the pomps of the world, and breaking his solemn Baptismal Promise.

Then again the vanities of the wicked world mean its idle, frivolous amusements; its vain and empty pleasures or pursuits. If these things, which, to say the best of them, are vain and trifling, take up our minds—if they keep us from our proper duty, or from praying or reading our Bibles, or otherwise serving God—if they make prayer irksome—if they intrude upon our thoughts at Church, or on Sunday—if we find that it is a relief to us to pass from the thoughts of religion to such light and idle subjects, that we like them the best, that we spend most time and most pleasantly in them, then we are yielding sinfully to the vanities of the world, and grievously forgetting our Baptismal Promises.

After the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, the person confirmed promises to renounce the sinful lusts of the flesh. These mean all the sinful desires which arise from our corrupt nature—such as envy, malice, avarice, undutifulness, pride, and many others; but above all, unchastity and impurity of thought and deed. Such things are, more than almost any other sins which we are tempted to commit, hateful to God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. They defile the mind to such a degree, that it is hardly possible with any effort to restore it to a healthy state, and they lead to almost every other sort of sin. Every person who in confirmation takes upon himself his Baptismal Promises, most solemnly engages in the sight of God and the Church that he will abstain from all such

things wholly and entirely. And not only from the deeds of such sin, but from the most secret thoughts of it. For it is of little use to restrain the outward exhibition of guilt, if the heart is allowed to cherish in secret the desire and wish of committing it. In the sight of God the sin is equal if the mind has been permitted to indulge in forbidden thoughts, or if those thoughts have taken the form of visible and external acts. Let all those then who are about to take upon themselves this most solemn vow, understand fully what it is that they do. Let them know, that they bind themselves anew to stifle and destroy all the movements of an unchaste and unholy spirit within them; that they bind themselves to cherish by every means in their power the opposite spirit of holiness and purity. Let them understand, that if they give way to such sins, and in deed or in thought indulge them, they break their Baptismal Vow, and incur the forfeiture of every Baptismal Privilege.

Such then is the Vow of Renunciation which was undertaken for each one of us at our Baptism by our Sponsors, which many who hear me now are about to ratify solemnly for themselves. It is no light or trivial promise. It binds a Christian to a very express and particular course of living. It deeply aggravates his guilt, if after so much and such undeserved mercy he be found yielding to the foolish pomp, or the idle and trifling pleasures of the world around him,—and still more if he be found to indulge in the inward wickedness of an unholy and impure heart. May it please God of His great mercy so to impress on the hearts of

all a sense of the engagements now made, that they may indeed abstain from all such sins during the whole course of their lives!

ROMANS xiii. ii.

And that knowing the time, that now it is high time for us to awake out of sleep: for now is our Salvation nearer than when we believed.

HAVING explained to you on Sunday last the meaning of the Vow of Renunciation which was made for each one of you at Baptism by your Sponsors, and which those who are to be confirmed are so shortly to take upon themselves, I proceed at present to speak of the other parts of the Baptismal Promise: the first of which is Belief, and the second Obedience.

The Sponsors in Baptism are interrogated by the officiating minister as to their belief in the Articles of the Christian Faith as contained in the Apostles' Creed: to which interrogation they reply that all this they do stedfastly believe. They are then asked whether they, acting on behalf of the infant for whom they appear, desire to be baptized in this faith: and upon their replying that they do so, the Minister proceeds to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

All of us therefore have had the privileges of believers from our earliest years. If we had not been

baptized till now, it would have been necessary that our Faith should have been tried and proved by a long course of preparatory instruction and discipline, and we should not have been received at the Font, or been admitted to become members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, till we had shewn by long and habitual zeal of learning and obedience that we did really believe in all the doctrines of Christianity for ourselves. But God has been pleased to place us in more favourable and happy circumstances. He allows the faith of our Parents and Sponsors to sanctify the yet unknowing and unthinking children. He receives the promise of Faith instead of its actual presence. He allows the habits of belief and obedience to be taught and learned after admission to the kingdom of Heaven, instead of being the previous condition of admission.

But it therefore becomes even the more necessary that we should each one of us believe, and that heartily and sincerely, the Christian doctrines for ourselves. As we have been taught to know God the Father who hath created us, God the Son who hath redeemed us, and God the Holy Ghost who hath sanctified and doth sanctify us, so we must take care to remain in this faith. As we have been early placed within the pale of God's Church, and baptized by His appointed ministers, so we must take care that we do not in any wilful or wanton spirit overstep that holy and blessed enclosure in which it is our happiness to find ourselves. Our belief, our communion with the Church, our course of life, were all settled and promised for us before we

could have any voice in the arrangement. Thence have flowed upon us innumerable blessings,—the blessing of Christian teaching and guidance, the blessing of infantine habits of prayer, the blessing of Christian friends, of practice of Christian duties, the blessing of the inward movements and solicitations of the Holy Spirit of God within our hearts. We therefore, now come to years of discretion, must do our diligence to walk in those simple paths of belief and obedience which were thus early marked out for us. We must destroy in ourselves, and discourage in others, that most unchristian spirit, of desiring to choose for ourselves the way which we shall tread: of following the sight of our own eyes, and the inclination of our own hearts. We must learn to thank God for having so early placed us in this state of salvation, and saved us from those great and innumerable dangers which we should have incurred if we had been all this time wandering about, as Heathen children, without God in the world. We must learn to pray to Him to keep us stedfast in our faith,—not to allow us to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine,—but to give us dutiful and submissive hearts, whereby we may simply attend to the voice of the Church, which is the voice of the Scriptures, and walk humbly with our God. To you, indeed, it is further necessary that you should particularly study and become acquainted with Christian doctrine. Having the benefit of education, which enables you to know the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament in their original language, you have the means of understanding Christian truth far more perfectly than the uneducated classes of your countrymen. Destined,

many of you, to become teachers and ministers of God's word, and all of you to move in such spheres in the world as to exercise much influence for good or evil upon those who shall be round about you; your faith will tend to encourage and keep up faith in others; your unbelief or carelessness of religion will tend to foster an irreligious spirit far more widely than you can now conceive. Remember, then, that in the vow which some of you are now about to take upon yourselves,—which all have lately taken, or will shortly take,—remember that you do solemnly and thankfully declare yourselves to believe all the Doctrines of the Christian Religion. Remember, and may the Holy Spirit of God teach you to remember effectually! that you are Christians, servants of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, members of a holy communion upon Earth, and inheritors of a glorious kingdom in Heaven. Remember that you allow no doubts to rise in your minds, but that you pray instantly to be pardoned for them, and to be assisted by God's grace to conquer them. Remember that the mode of obtaining a pure and steady faith is to do God's will, for Christ himself hath said, that if any man shall do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Remember that you must never allow the slightest levity or trifling with religious truth. The person who permits himself to jest of these things, to talk of them sportively or lightly, to parody the words of Scripture, to quote them irreverently,—not only insults and dishonours God, but what is less obvious but not less certain, trifles most dangerously with his own faith. A word, or phrase, thoughtlessly uttered perhaps, and at the time as thoughtlessly heard, returns again and again to poison

the pure stream of prayer, to disengage and distract the solemnity of meditation, to harass and distress an anxious faith. So keen is the temper of Satan's weapons, so deadly his wounds, unless the spirit of man be watchful and sustained by grace, through prayer, to repel or cure them! So true again is it that a light and thoughtless temper is among the greatest dangers which there is to true and earnest Religion! And when you come to be men, to mix in the actual conflict of the world, to experience its real dangers, and to regret in your most inward hearts the want of pure and steady faith, to wish nothing so anxiously and vehemently as a simple and unsuspecting belief and habits of unbroken reverence;—when you recur to the thought of your *first* childhood, and dwell with fondness and gratitude on the lessons of prayer you then learned, the gentle religious influence which was exercised upon your hearts and conduct by the kind and constant tenderness of your parents, and the state of pure-mindedness and religious earnestness with which you first left home, and came to school,—then you will feel (as every Christian man who has traversed the same course before you can assure you in bitter regret and sorrow) that it was in these years of light-hearted companionship, of thoughtlessness and levity, that things were said, and things were done, which you would give your very lives never to have heard or seen; that irreverence, perhaps more express sin, first became less shocking to you,—that your minds lost the bloom of freshness of comparative innocence. Alas! that experience cannot be given at second-hand! Alas! that we cannot doubt that many among you, some few years hence, will be endeavouring to impress

these same cautions, and from his own experience, upon another generation as heedless, and as soon to repent of their heedlessness!

I trust and believe that those who are now so soon to take upon themselves the solemn vow of Faith and Obedience, are seriously impressed with the desire of doing it most sincerely and earnestly. Let me urge them to remember that in this act, and in the years which shall immediately follow after this act, they will to a great extent settle and confirm their future characters. If they, now earnest, will henceforth be diligent and regular in prayer, they may do much to overcome the dangers which surround them. The Holy Spirit of God is promised to those who pray. With His aid anxiously cherished, they may go through these perilous years unhurt.

And this brings me to say a few words on the last portion of the Baptismal Promise, the Vow of continued obedience; "and thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of my life." I need not tell you that you cannot keep this vow without God's help. I need not tell you that it is presumptuous and unholy to make this vow, unless you intend and purpose ever to seek for that help as alone it is to be obtained. The means of obtaining it are the constant use of private and public prayer and the Holy Sacraments; and I now and here give you notice, that henceforth we shall hope and wish that those of you who are confirmed should appear at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Entered on your

Christian manhood, you need a Christian man's support. Having for yourselves renounced the dominion of Sin and Satan, you need the weapons of the Christian armour—having vowed for yourselves the Vow of Faith and Obedience, you need the assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable you to fulfil it.

And with the use of the Holy Sacrament let me particularly and earnestly urge upon you the regular use of your private prayers. I am well aware that one of the great difficulties which beset a boy of religious principle on coming to a great School like this, is to persevere in saying his prayers. The example of others entices him to omit them; perhaps their ridicule, or the fear of it, deters him from them. Let me assure you, and with the solemnity of a Minister of God's word, trusted to a fearful extent with the responsibility of your spiritual welfare, that without your regular prayers you can have no safety. Never omit them. Whether you are busy, or tired; surrounded by those who sympathize with your feeling, or deride it, never omit them. They will recall holy thoughts which otherwise would soon wear off from your minds. They will shew you the real character of various usages or practices which otherwise you would not have suspected. They will keep you from daily sin, by recalling you to daily repentance. They will cherish in your hearts the influence of the Spirit of God whom you received in Baptism.

This day is Advent Sunday—a holy and high day to all Christians, as the day on which we begin to com-

memorate the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into this world,—the beginning of that season, in which, commemorating His first coming, we are directed to prepare ourselves more expressly against His second coming. But it is a day to be particularly regarded by those who are so soon to take upon themselves their own Christian Vows. The services of the day, all selected with express reference to the Season of Advent, bear particularly upon their situation. While all Christians of the Church of England pray in to-day's Collect, that they may have grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put upon them the armour of light: such a prayer is especially suitable to those who are just about to renounce, with the utmost solemnity, those very works of darkness, and to promise to walk after the Will and Commandments of God. While again the language of to-day's Epistle warns all that it is high time to awake out of sleep, for their salvation is nearer than when they first believed; that the night is far spent—the day at hand; that therefore they should put away the works of darkness, and put upon them the armour of light: how particularly applicable are these expressions to those who have now reached the term of their childhood, who in coming forward to take upon themselves their Christian Vows, know that they have now advanced the first stage of their Christian life—that their salvation is nearer than when they first were received as believers! They are now passing from their unthinking childhood. They are coming forward to make profession of their personal Repentance, Faith, and Obedience. They know not how soon it may please God to cut short their lives, and with their lives

their earthly trial. They hereby make, so to speak, a new beginning, a beginning of they know not how long or how short a life. As they now feel that they are acting in serious and solemn purpose, so may they continue under God's grace to fulfil their purposes! They will shortly separate, and go to their respective homes. In the approaching festival of Christmas they will all have the opportunity of communicating in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This will come appropriately after their Confirmation. They are now fit, from their age, to approach the Lord's table. I trust that all feel their need of grace, and that all who feel that need will take that surest method of supplying it. And may the Holy Spirit of God, by whom they were sanctified in their Baptism, who alone is the source and origin of all the religious designs and desires with which they now approach the Sacred Rite of Confirmation, so bless and strengthen them, that they may earnestly resolve and promise, and diligently and faithfully fulfil their Promise! that after living in true and constant Faith and Obedience while they remain on the Earth, and continually repenting of their Sins, we may all meet in the Kingdom of our Common Lord and Saviour, for His sake, who died for our Sins, and rose again for our Justification.

THE END.

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